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List 6

SICKERT

Etchings and Dry-points

Walter Richard Sickert
1860-1942

A travelling exhibition arranged by the Circulation Department of the Victoria & Albert Museum

Walter Richard Sickert, arguably the most important British painter of the first half of the twentieth century, was born in Munich in 1860 of Danish descent. His father and grandfather were both artists of distinction, while through his English mother he seems to have inherited his considerable qualities of intellect as well as his love for the theatre.

His family came to live permanently in England in 1868 and he was educated mainly in London. After leaving school he went on the stage for a while, playing in Irving's company, before entering the Slade School in 1881. His stay there was brief, for a chance meeting with Whistler persuaded him to give up his art studies in order to assist in printing the Master's etchings, and it was in his studio that Sickert learned the art of etching as well as much that was fundamental to his painting.

Throughout the early eighties Whistler remained the paramount influence on Sickert's development and in the winter of 1883 he acted as Whistler's courier in taking to Paris for exhibition the celebrated *Portrait of my Mother*. In the course of this visit Sickert first met Degas, who became an intimate friend and exercised a profound influence on Sickert's artistic career. It was clearly the example of Degas' theatre-scenes which prompted Sickert to produce his Music Hall paintings of the late eighties, themes on which so many other paintings and etchings were later to be based. The influence of other major French painters of the late nineteenth century is apparent in Sickert's subsequent work, notably that of Cézanne, Pissarro, the Nabis and Toulouse-Lautrec.

Besides Whistler and the influence of contemporary French painting, another vital force in Sickert's artistic development was his intense admiration for the English comic draughtsmen, especially Rowlandson, Cruikshank, Leech and – above all – Charles Keene. For the latter, who was a cherished friend, Sickert had an abounding admiration, referring to him as 'the greatest English artist of the nineteenth century'. His concern with the quality of line and with humanity as subject matter places Sickert firmly in the English tradition. He delighted to explore the formal beauty of his subjects, no matter how humble or conventionally sordid these might seem to be. His drawing shows an economy of line and directness of statement which is an enduring characteristic throughout his career and a quality which is well seen in his etchings.

The earliest etchings, made between 1883 and 1890, are frequently mere sketches made directly on to small, grounded copper-plates which Sickert could carry in his pockets, subjects such as *An audience* (no. 2) and *On the sands, Scheveningen* (no. 6). At the same time he was capable of producing work of very considerable power and eloquence such as *The Acting Manager* (no. 1), *The Kitchen, Holland* (no. 5) and *Emily Lyndale as 'Sinbad the Sailor'* (no. 6).

Sickert had married his first wife, Ellen Cobden, in 1885, and, after a honeymoon spent mainly in Dieppe, a place familiar to Sickert from childhood, the couple set up house in London. From then until the break-up of his marriage in 1899 his principal works were portraits, scenes in Dieppe and Music Hall subjects. Between 1890 and 1906 Sickert made very few etchings and the present exhibition includes only two of these, *Portrait of a Lady* of 1894 (no. 8) and *Rue Notre Dame, Dieppe* of about 1902 (nos. 9 & 10). His classic Dieppe period commenced in 1899 on his settling there after his divorce and it remained his principal home until 1905, inspiring the production of a beautiful series of paintings of the Church of St Jacques and its environs. There were, however, two long periods of absence in Venice, firstly during the winter of 1900–01 and then from the end of 1903 until December 1904, during which he produced the important series of paintings of Venice and of Venetian female models which forms such a major part of his achievement. The etching of *The Horses of St. Mark's* (no. 25) was probably executed about 1915, based on Sickert's several treatments of the subject in about 1901, and is an excellent illustration of his habit of returning to earlier subjects.

Sickert resumed etching after his return to London and in 1906 produced one of his most important plates in *Noctes Ambrosianae* (no. 11), characteristically taken from a painting of 1895. Various other Music Hall subjects followed (see nos. 12 & 13) but the years following his return to England were mainly important for the gradual formation under Sickert's leadership of the Camden Town Group leading up through the New English Art Club to the Group's first exhibition in 1911. Notable subjects from this most significant period of Sickert's career are the two *Camden Town Murder* variations (nos. 14 & 15), *Jack Ashore* (no. 18) and the two *Ennui* plates (nos. 31 & 32). This theme of a man and a woman in an interior was developed by Sickert from his earlier Venetian studies of a woman in an interior. It remained a favourite theme and may also be encountered in *A Weak Defence* (no. 19), *A Little Cheque* (no. 28) and *The Handicap* (no. 35).

At the outbreak of war in 1914 Sickert was again in Dieppe with his second wife, Christine Drummond-Angus, whom he had married in 1911. On their return to England he treated certain subjects of patriotic immediacy such as *The Soldiers of Albert the Good* (no. 23) and *Red Cross* (no. 22). He rented a studio in Red Lion Square and worked there until he moved to Bath in 1916. From this time comes a small group of paintings in which a piano figures prominently and to which *Kitty K.* (no. 36) may be related. During 1915–16 the firm of Carfax & Co. published a series of Sickert's plates and several examples of these are included (nos. 20, 21, 24, 27–30 & 32). From the period of residence in Bath comes *Pulteney Bridge* (no. 33).

By this time Sickert's attitude towards print-making had become greatly modified and he had expressed his opinions vigorously in two articles, the first in January 1912 in the *English Review* and then in September 1915 in the *Burlington Magazine*. In these he attacked the so-called 'revival' of etching in Britain and the critical obscurantism attendant upon a pre-occupation with 'velvety blacks' and the nuances

of states. In Sickert's view the medium was basically an efficient method of reproducing a drawing cheaply for purposes of study and analysis. He reached the conclusion that a plate should be brought by the artist to a point at which he could be satisfied that nothing pertaining to its ultimate effect had been left to the skill or otherwise of the printer. In consequence his use of the medium became much more concerned with linear quality and he inclined to the use of the dry-point needle and the graver or burin to achieve his desired effects.

Sickert and his wife returned to Dieppe in 1919 and Christine Sickert died there in October 1920. After her death Sickert gave up their house and moved into a furnished flat in the Rue Aguado. From this period come the two plates *Armoire à glace* and *The New Tie* (nos. 43 & 44).

In 1922 Sickert returned to London and in 1924 was elected an Associate member of the Royal Academy. He became a full member in 1934 but resigned in the following year. In the early twenties he was still interested in theatre subjects and revived a number of earlier themes. For examples of such plates see *The Olympia, Shoreditch, Gaité Montparnasse, Sonia Alomis* (nos. 39–41) and *In memoriam: Harry Anderson* (no. 45). These plates also serve to illustrate the increasingly spare technique developed by Sickert after his rejection of the concept of the 'fine print'.

In 1926 Sickert married the artist Thérèse Lessore. In 1934 they moved from London to St Peter's in Thanet, and from 1938 until his death in 1942 they lived at Bathampton, near Bath.

Sickert's print-making continued at least until 1929 and the two latest plates in the exhibition are concerned respectively with Dieppe (*Barnett's Veterans*, no. 48) and the theatre (*Cheerio*, no. 49). It seems appropriate that the collection should end with the recurrence of these two themes which had proved so consistently rewarding throughout his long working life.

It will be evident from the exhibition that from early in his career Sickert's prints are fairly consistently related to his paintings, although many years may separate the one from the other. Sickert never took the opportunity to explore on the copper-plate themes which he could not pursue in his canvases, as did G. B. Tiepolo and Goya for example. The prints do, however, have an intense life of their own, always being further explorations of, or interesting variations on, the original subject. One never senses in them any feeling of self-conscious striving after effect, and it is their spontaneity and immediacy of impact which is their lasting strength.

Throughout his career Sickert had no concern with the adequate documentation of his plates or with the limitation of editions. Some of his copper-plates still remained uncancelled at the time of his death, so that it was possible for quite large editions to be printed before their eventual cancellation. The many unrecorded states and re-workings make it highly improbable that any complete catalogue of the etched work can now ever be completed.

Bibliography

Bibliography

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L. Browse, ed. *Sickert. Edited by Lillian Browse with an essay on his life and notes on his paintings; and with an essay on his art by R. Wilenski*. London, Faber & Faber, Ltd, 1943.

L. Browse. *Sickert*. London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1960.

1 *The Acting Manager* (*Mrs. D'Oyly Carte*). Etching, 1884
A portrait of Helen Couper-Black, Rupert D'Oyly Carte's second wife, who was greatly involved in the direction of his theatrical ventures; also known as *Lady in lamplight* and *Evening tea*. There is a full-length portrait in oils of about the same date, showing Mrs D'Oyly Carte seated on a sofa, which was one of the first paintings to be exhibited by Sickert.
Circ. 387–1968

2 *An audience*. Etching, c. 1885
A pencil inscription on the back suggests that the subject of the print is *A café audience* and it was under this title that it was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April, 1960, no. 66.
Circ. 102–1961

3 *Portrait of a Girl*. Etching, c. 1885
Lent by M. J. Franklin, Esq.
M.J.F. Loan 1

4 *The Market Place in the Place Nationale, Dieppe*. Trial proof. Etching, probably c. 1885
Another plate showing the Market in the Place Nationale is signed and dated 1885.
Circ. 132–1971

5 *The Kitchen, Holland* (*or Girl in a kitchen*). Etching, 1886
This subject probably derives from Sickert's visit to Holland in 1885 during his marriage trip. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in their 'Century of Modern Drawings and Prints', 7 June–9 July 1971, no. 185.
Circ. 131 & 131A–1971

6 *On the sands, Scheveningen*. Etching, 1887
The title is derived from a pencil inscription on the back and is that used when this print was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 41.
Circ. 103–1961

7 *Emily Lyndale as 'Sinbad the Sailor' at Gatti's Arches* (*Tom Tinsley in the Chair*). 2nd state. Etching, c. 1888
The title is derived from a pencil inscription on the back and is that used when this print was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 28. The setting was also known to Sickert as 'Gatti's Hungerford Palace of Varieties' and is now better known as the Players' Theatre at Charing Cross. There are various related drawings and a painting of about 1888. Tom Tinsley was Chairman at both the Arches and Gatti's other Music Hall in Westminster Bridge Road.
Circ. 224–1961

8 *Portrait of a Lady*. Finalstate. Etching, 1894
Given by The Sickerts Trust, through Mrs Louise Powell
E. 88–1950

9 *La rue Notre Dame, Dieppe*. 2nd state. Etching and aquatint (textured with cloth), c. 1902
This was a favourite subject with Sickert between 1899 and 1902 and there are at least seven paintings and three drawings recorded. A painting of 1902 is very close to this print in composition. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 129.
Circ. 111–1961

10 *La rue Notre Dame, Dieppe*. Later state (unidentified). Etching and aquatint (textured with cloth), c. 1902
See the preceding entry.
Lent by the Arts Council of Great Britain
A.C.L. 24

11 *Noctes Ambrosianae* (*The Mogul Tavern*). Etching and aquatint, 1906
A painting of this subject was executed about 1895 and was exhibited at the New English Art Club in June–July 1906. There is an etching of the left-hand side of the composition, with some variant details, dated 1908, which is entitled *The Mogul Tavern, Drury Lane*. The setting is the Old Middlesex Music Hall in Drury Lane which was attached to a public house called 'The Great Mogul'.
Circ. 114–1961

12 *The New Bedford*. Long plate. Trial proof, printed on a sheet too small to take the complete plate. Etching, c. 1907
The New Bedford Music Hall in Camden Town was built to replace the Old Bedford, which was destroyed by fire in 1899. After his return to London in the latter part of 1905 Sickert paid many visits to the theatre to draw the audience in the new interior with its elegant full-length caryatids. There are at least six recorded paintings of the subject as well as several drawings.
Circ. 388–1968

13 *The Old Bedford*. Small plate. Etching, c. 1908
This subject exists in more versions than any other of the theatre interiors there being at least six paintings and four drawings recorded, the earliest probably being about 1890. The Old Bedford Music Hall in Camden Town was burnt down in 1899 and was subsequently rebuilt as the New Bedford. This plate appears to date from shortly after Sickert's resumption of etching in 1906. For a later and larger version of the subject see no. 21 in the catalogue. The present plate is a reversal of the subject as shown in the paintings. An alternative title is *Cupid in the Gallery*.
Circ. 105–1961

14 *The Camden Town Murder*. 3rd and smallest version. Etching, 1908
The Camden Town Murder took place in September 1907 and provided Sickert with a conveniently evocative generic title for a series of studies of a man and a woman in an interior. The series was begun after his return to London in 1905 and stemmed from his Venetian studies of figures in an interior. There are, however, many variants both in composition and title. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 95.
Circ. 106–1961

15 *La Belle Gatée* (*a variation of 'The Camden Town Murder'*). Etching (textured with cloth), 1908
Another version of *The Camden Town Murder* with one of Sickert's variant titles, which also include *Summer Afternoon* and *What shall we do for the rent?* This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in their 'Century of Modern Drawings and Prints', 7 June–9 July 1971, no. 186. It is probably that used for pl. 28A in L. Browse's *Sickert*, 1943.
Circ. 130–1971

16 *The Old Middlesex*. Large plate. 3rd state, only proof. Etching, c. 1910
A painting of this subject was executed about 1887. This impression bears a dedication in pencil from the artist to Madeline Knox, who printed his plates at the school of etching at Rowlandson House, Hampstead Road, which existed until the outbreak of the First World War. After the end of 1911 Sickert rejected the mystique of the 'fine print' and refused to have anything more to do with 'states' and 'impressions'. As the pencil inscriptions on this impression are in Sickert's hand, the plate clearly antedates this period. There is a Small plate version of the subject of c. 1915. For a note on the Old Middlesex Music Hall see no. 11 above.
Circ. 225–1961

17 *The Old Middlesex*. Large plate. 4th state, only proof. Etching, c. 1910
See note on no. 16 above. This impression is similarly inscribed in pencil by Sickert.
Lent by the Arts Council of Great Britain
A.C.L. 25

18 *Jack Ashore*. Large plate. 3rd state. Soft-ground etching and dry-point, c. 1911
A painting of this subject was executed in 1911. There are various drawings related to it, one of which may be dated 1910. There is also a second, smaller print dated 1923. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 202.
Circ. 115–1961

19 *A Weak Defence* (*or Defence and Attack*). First variation. Large plate. Etching, c. 1912
A drawing of this subject may be similarly dated. A Small plate version also exists. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 75.
Circ. 107–1961

20 *Quai Henri IV*. 3rd and published state. Etching, 1915
In its second state this plate is signed by Sickert and dated 1915. It belongs to the series of plates published in 1915 and 1916 by Carfax & Co. The title derives from a street name in Dieppe.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders.
Circ. 281–1967

21 *The Old Bedford*. Medium upright plate. 7th state. Etching, 1915
For a note on this subject see no. 13 preceding. The Small plate of this subject (no. 13) is a reversal of the paintings and a reduced version of the composition. The present print is one of the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 141.
Circ. 113–1961

22 *Red Cross*. 5th and published state. Soft-ground etching, c. 1915
It is recorded that in the autumn and winter of 1914 Sickert painted a few war pictures. It seems reasonable, therefore, to date this print a little later.
Lent by the Arts Council of Great Britain
A.C.L. 23

23 *The Soldiers of Albert the Good*. 5th state. Etching, c. 1915
Sickert painted the subject of this print towards the end of 1914, basing his composition on a press photograph of an incident in the defence of Lille. He persuaded Belgian soldiers to pose for him at his studio in Red Lion Square and the painting was eventually sold for the benefit of the Belgian Relief Fund. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 189. An alternative title for the subject is *The Soldiers of King Albert the Ready*
Circ. 112–1961

24 *Mother and Daughter*. 3rd and published state. Etching, c. 1915
This plate is closely related to the oil-painting entitled *Lou! Lou! I love you* executed in 1911. There is also a soft-ground etching of about 1910, entitled *The Passing Funeral*, which is closely related. The present plate is one of the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 106.
Circ. 108–1961

25 *The Horses of St. Mark's*. Etching, c. 1915
Sickert's main period of activity in Venice was from the end of 1903 to December 1904 but the series of paintings of this subject date from an earlier visit in the winter of 1900–01. At this time Sickert was not etching at all and most of his Venetian subjects were etched and published about 1913 to 1915.
Circ.–1 272963

26 *Kitty K.* (*Red Lion Square*). Large plate. State before letters. Etching and dry-point, c. 1915
There is a slightly smaller etched version of this subject which is dated 1920. However, the inscription 'Red Lion Sq.' on this plate seems to relate it to the oil-painting *Tipperary, the Piano Picture* of 1914 and to other 'Piano' paintings of the Red Lion Square studio painted in a period from September 1914 until some date in 1916, when the studio was given up because of enemy action.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 286–1967

27 *Sally* (*or La Toilette*). Early state, before letters. Etching, c. 1915
Despite the title of this print, the model in this composition is one of Sickert's favourite models of the Camden Town period, Marie Hayes. A drawing of similar composition exists which may be dated to about 1909. This print is from the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 279–1967

28 *A Little Cheque*. Published state. Etching, c. 1915
This is a subject related to the 'Man and woman in an interior' compositions of the Camden Town period. The print is from the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 280–1967

29 *Femme de Lettres*. Large plate. 6th and published state. Dry-point, c. 1915
The print is from the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 87.
Circ. 104–1961

30 *Et delator es . . .* 3rd and published state. Dry-point and engraving, c. 1915
This print is from a drawing in ink and charcoal, entitled *Vacerra*, of c. 1913 and is one of the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916. The titles of both the print and the drawing are derived from one of Martial's epigrams. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 179.
Circ. 110–1961

31 *Ennui*. Small (or Second) plate. Dry-point, c. 1915
The earliest version of this well-known subject was painted about 1913 and the latest about 1918. The models are 'Hubby', Sickert's servant, and Marie Hayes. There are at least three prints of the subject. For a larger version see no. 32 following.
Circ. 229–1961

32 *Ennui*. Large plate. 5th and presumed final state. Dry-point and engraving, c. 1915
See note at no. 31 preceding. This print is from the series published by Carfax & Co. in 1915 and 1916. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Agnew in March–April 1960, no. 158.
Circ. 389–1968

33 *Pulteney Bridge, Bath*. First state. Etching, c. 1917
There are at least six paintings and two drawings of this subject, all executed between 1916 and 1918 during Sickert's war-time residence in Bath.
Circ. 602–1969

34 *The London, Shoreditch*. Final state. Etching, 1920
There is a drawing of 1920 showing the interior of the theatre but in a completely different composition. The London Music Hall was in Shoreditch High Street, having opened there in 1856. At the time of its closure in 1934 it was known as the Shoreditch Empire.
Circ. 600–1968

35 *The Handicap*. Dry-point and engraving, 1920
Although dated 1920 this subject is clearly related to Sickert's favourite 'Man and woman in an interior' theme of the Camden Town period.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 288–1967

36 *Mushrooms*. Final state. Etching, 1920
A painting of this subject was executed at Envermeu, near Dieppe, in 1919.
Circ. 222–1961

37 *Sussex Place, Regent's Park*. Etching, 1920
This plate is also known by the alternative title of *The Park Railings*.
Given by Miss Sylvia Gosse
E. 2603–1948

38 *The Little Visitor* (*or Wellington House*). Etching, c. 1920
This subject has also been associated with the title *Dressing for Church*.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 282–1967

39 The Olympia, Shoreditch. Trial proof. Etching and engraving, c. 1920
Sickert was actively engaged with this theme in 1920, and there is a pen and water-colour drawing of that year which shows the stage of the theatre in a different composition. 'The Olympia' was originally known as 'The Standard' and stood at the corner of Great Eastern Street in Shoreditch. This impression was exhibited by Messrs Ernest Brown & Phillips at The Leicester Galleries in October 1971, no. 97.
Circ. 677–1971

40 *Gaité Montparnasse*. 1st state (before letters and the reduction of the plate). Etching, c. 1920
There is a drawing of the Gaité Montparnasse which may be dated to about 1895 as well as an oil-painting of similar date. It is known that Sickert also did a series of drawings of Parisian music halls in the winter of 1906–07. This is another example of Sickert returning to a favourite theme of earlier years.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 283–1967

41 *Sonia Alomis*. Final state. Etching, c. 1920
A portrait of an actress who appeared in London with a company from Vilna in the Yiddish play by S. Ansky entitled 'The Dybuk'. This also is, presumably, a reversion by Sickert to an earlier theme.
Given by The Sickerts Trust, through Mrs Louise Powell
E. 84–1950

42 *The Barnacle Woman* (*or The Café Royal*). Final state. Etching, c. 1920
Circ. 223–1961

43 '*Mon rêve ça a toujours été d'avoir une armoire à glace*'. 1st state. Etching, 1922
This subject was one which interested Sickert whilst he was living in the flat in the Rue Aguado, Dieppe, which he rented after the death of his second wife in October 1920. His model was Marie Pepin, who had been his maid for many years. This is the only composition in which she is known to have acted as a model. Sickert himself said of the subject 'It is a sort of study à la Balzac.' The subject is often entitled more briefly *Armoire à glace*. See also no. 44 following.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 287–1967

44 *The New Tie*.? 2nd state. Etching, 1922
The composition of this subject is virtually identical with that of '*Mon rêve ça a toujours été d'avoir une armoire à glace*' (see no. 43 preceding) with the addition of the man standing in front of the looking-glass. A painting of this subject was executed at Dieppe in the Rue Aguado flat in either 1921 or 1922. There is also a drawing of 1914.
Circ. 633–1968

45 *In Memoriam: Harry Anderson chez!* Final state. Etching, 1922
A portrait in character of the music hall singer Harry Anderson with quotations from some of his well-known songs inscribed on the plate. A drawing of Harry Anderson, entitled *In Memoriam*, is dated 1888 and this print is clearly another example of Sickert reverting to an earlier theme.
Given by Miss Ethel Saunders in memory of her sister, Miss Helen Saunders
Circ. 285–1967

46 *Mrs Tatlock* (*Cicely Hey*). Large plate. Final state. Etching, c. 1923
Cicely Hey, the wife of R. R. Tatlock, art critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, was friendly with Sickert throughout the twenties and he painted her portrait on several occasions, the first time being shortly after his return to London from Dieppe at the close of 1922.
Circ. 390–1968

47 *Au Rocher de Cancale*.? Final state. Etching, c. 1923
The Restaurant du Rocher-de-Cancale was situated in the Rue de Lamoricière, Dieppe. This plate probably dates from shortly after Sickert's return to London from Dieppe in 1922.
Circ. 406–1962

48 *Barnett's Veterans* (*or 'They also serve . . .'*). 2nd and published state. Etching, 1926
The subject of this print is the row of fiacres owned by a Mr Barnett which stood on the Quai Henri IV, Dieppe. There is a drawing of the subject of about 1910.
Circ. 634–1968

49 *Chorus*. Trial proof of the published state. Etching, 1929
This print is based on a painting of 1928 entitled *The Plaza Tiller Girls*, which was apparently made from a press photograph. There is another painting on the same theme entitled *The High Steppers*.
Given by Miss Sylvia Gosse
E. 2609–1948